

## Rooted in the Infinite Divinity

### **Rooted in the Infinite Divinity**

Community is an act of creation. In this heartfelt sermon, Nate M. Esparza (he/they) explores what it means to build liberatory spaces that don't ask us to disappear. Through personal story, sacred imagination, and a call to collective care, Nate reminds us: design is spiritual—and liberation is something we build together. Presented by Nate Esparza, Congregational Life Staff, Southern Region.

Prelude: "[You Are Safe](#)" by Alanah

Chalice Lighting: "[We Are Loved Beyond All Measure](#)" By Rev. Jami Yandle

Opening Hymn: "When Our Heart is in a Holy Place" #1008 STJ

Call to Worship: "[Trans Joy](#)" by Jess Martinez-Hunt

Offertory: "[True Colors](#)" by Alanah

Receiving the Offertory: "We Are Building A New Way" #1017 STJ

A Time for All Ages: "[Not Quite Narwhal](#)" by Jessie Sima

Reading: "[Prayer](#)" by the Rt. Rev. Steven Charleston

Sermon: "[Rooted in the Infinite Divinity](#)" by Nat Esparza

Closing Hymn: "How Could Anyone" #1053 STJ

Postlude: "[Big Love Ahead](#)" by Mon Rovia

### **Sermon Text**

I believe we build the world with our choices, with our habits, our rituals, our blueprints with who we imagine into our lives and who we forget to.

My name is Nate Esparza, he they, and I serve as the Southern regional administrator for the Unitarian Universalist Association. And I'm currently earning my master of Arts and religious studies on the path to becoming an interfaith chaplain.

As a WellStar fellow, I'm conducting research on what it means to age and die as a trans person, work that is equal parts academic and deeply personal. I also serve as an interim board member for the LGBTQ plus Institute at the National Center for Civil and Human Rights, where I help uplift and advocate for the sacred lives in our community.

From that brief bio, you can probably guess. I think a lot about systems, stories and how we care for each other. In short, I am a huge nerd.

One of the ways I explore these ideas is through story rich games like Dungeons and Dragons. Even if you've never played it, here's what you need to know at its heart. D and D is about building a world together, a place where every person at the table matters. Where the story can't move forward unless everyone has a role, where imagination isn't just encouraged, it's how you survive in that way.

It reminds me of our Unitarian Universalist principles, the way we commit to the inherent worth and dignity of every person. The call to justice and equity, and the invitation to build beloved community, not just in theory, but in practice.

I believe imagination is a spiritual discipline, especially for those of us who've had to imagine ourselves into existence. And that's what I want to talk about today.

What happens when our communities are acts of creation, but the blueprint was never made with people like us in mind? Who do we design for, even unconsciously, and who do we forget? And what does it cost to be the ones always imagining yourself in?

I didn't grow up knowing what a trans man was. Not really. The only trans stories I saw were cruel parodies. Trans women were mocked or erased. Femininity was treated like a joke. And masculinity. I was taught it could only be dominant, violent, or cold. So I tried to be safe, palatable. I thought if I disappeared just right, it might feel like peace. And I'll be honest, I was scared of trans people, not because I hated them, but because I didn't understand. Because no one had ever told me someone like me could be sacred, could belong, could be real.

It wasn't until after my divorce, mid twenties, heartbroken and cracked open that I heard a whisper I could finally receive.

You are a trans man.

Not because I rejected the divine feminine, but because I was ready to love the divine masculine in others and in myself. That was the beginning of my becoming. But even now, most spaces were not built for someone like me in mind.

I'm trans, I'm autistic. I live with POTS and Ehlers-Danlos syndrome and PTSD. I move through the world in a body and mind that don't always cooperate. And systems that rarely accommodate. Disability for me isn't just physical, it's cultural, it's architectural, it's spiritual. It's being told you can belong here, but only if you don't need too much.

I've been labeled intense, inflexible, over communicative. I've asked for access and been met with confusion or silence. I've tried to mask my needs just to stay in a room. And every time I've done that, I've had to let go of a little of my own meaning making, because that's the cost of forgetting people in our own blueprints.

We lose stories, we lose presence, we lose trust. We make people prove that they belong. Instead of building spaces where they just do too often we treat access as something reactive, something we implement after someone speaks up. But that's not care, that's crisis management. Care is designed and design is spiritual. Every choice we make about how we gather, how we speak, move, and listen is a theological statement about who we expect to show up and who we expect to carry the burden of fitting in.

Unitarian Universalism gave me a doorway back into sacred story. Not by asking me to be someone I wasn't, but by letting me bring all of who I am into the road. After years of being told my story was sinful, fragmented, or didn't belong, UU didn't hand me a script. It gave me space to hold the questions. It gave me the language to name myself as sacred. I grew up watching religion divide people like me from the holy. But here in this tradition, I found something different. A story that could hold transness, that could hold disability, that could hold the full complexity of being human and still call it divine.

But it also asks me sometimes to disappear a little. And I know I'm not alone in our congregations. Exclusion doesn't always shout. It whispers. You're so strong, we're still learning the right language. I don't see you as trans. I just see you as you. These words are meant to comfort. But they often ask us to shrink, to make our needs and identity smaller so no one else has to stretch. And then we end up giving from empty cups. We call it strength. We call it inclusion, but it is not resilience. It is depletion. It is martyrdom. Masquerading is belonging.

Stop giving from an empty cup and calling it care.

That is why I believe in community care, not as charity, not as pity, but as shared responsibility, as sacred design. And advocacy only works when we radically care for each other and we radically care for ourselves. And right now, we are so tired. The world is burning. We are grieving. And many of us, especially the most marginalized, do not know and are scared we won't survive it.

But this is not the first time people have imagined their way out of erasure. We come from people who have made ways out of no way, who left marks in the margins, when the center had no room, who turned survival into song and ritual and story and uprising. We've done this before and we can do it again.

So what does this look like? What does it mean to build communities that imagine? Imagine us in from the start. Here's what I've learned.

Build for difference. Not after it's requested, but from the start. Access isn't about accommodating a single diagnosis. It's about designing spaces that don't assume sameness.

Show up even when it's clumsy. Don't wait to be perfect. Just don't disappear.

Support local, queer, and disabled businesses. Mechanics, cleaners, massage therapists, designers, your money preaches to create networks of care. Ride shares, emergency funds, buddy systems, flexible roles. Let your community care be structured, not ad hoc.

Share your tools. If you use an app or a checklist or a captioning service, let someone else benefit too. We, we are not meant to hoard care.

Resource and trust disabled and trans leaders. Don't just invite us to the table, fund the damn table.

Let us lead. Let us rest and keep learning. Access is not a checkbox. It is a question that you return to again and again. Who is not here and why? Because our communities are acts of creation.

Every system, every gathering, every welcome is a blueprint for what we believe is sacred.

So I'll ask you again, if our communities are acts of creation, who are we imagining into them and who are we leaving out? And if that question makes you uncomfortable, good

because discomfort is where change begins.

Whatever you do next, let it be real. Let it be rooted in love.

Let it be imperfect and human and ongoing because that's what true community care looks like. That's what liberation demands. We've been invisible. Now it's time to be heard, to be trusted, and to shape what comes next.

In the end, we all want the same thing, to feel less alone, to feel seen, and to know that our stories, our lives, and our futures truly matter.

Thank you.